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SUBJECT: FIRST LADY VISITS GHANA

1. Summary: First Lady Laura Bush visited Ghana on January 15-17 in what will be remembered as a highlight in U.S.-Ghana relations. Accompanied by daughter Barbara, she launched the Africa Education Initiative Textbooks and Learning Materials Program in Africa, visited an HIV/AIDS clinic in a local hospital, and attended a lunch at the Castle hosted by President John Kufuor. The visit generated major local and international press. End summary.

2. First Lady Laura Bush arrived in Ghana late on January 15, traveled to Liberia for the inauguration of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on January 16, and returned for a half day of events in Accra on January 17. She was accompanied by daughter Barbara and Dr. Cindy Courville of the NSC.

Launching the Africa Education Initiative

3. The First Lady arrived in Ghana to a welcome by senior government officials and a red carpet review of traditional dancers and drummers. President Kufuor stopped by the Ambassador's residence to welcome her shortly after arrival. She began her day on January 17 at the Accra Teachers Training College, where she launched President Bush's Africa Education Initiative (AEI) Textbooks and Learning Materials Program in Africa. She witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the USG (with Ambassador Pamela Bridgewater signing on behalf of USAID), the Government of Ghana, and Chicago State University to implement the Ghana program. (Note: In addition to this Ghana partnership, the AEI program links four other U.S. universities in partnerships to provide 15 million text books to primary schools in South Africa, Senegal, Zambia, Tanzania. End note.) In her remarks, the First Lady highlighted the U.S. commitment to strengthening educational opportunities in Africa and announced the donation of 25,000 books to schools in Ghana. President Kufuor joined the event, with an audience of around 750 teachers and students.

Visiting an HIV/AIDS Treatment Center

4. The First Lady then visited the Fevers HIV/AIDS treatment and care unit at the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra. This integrated HIV/AIDS treatment and care site was one of the first AIDS treatment programs funded through U.S. government assistance and is one of the first sites using antiretrovirals in Africa. Mrs. Bush toured the clinic and spoke with in-patients as well as a group of women and children living with HIV/AIDS, who highlighted the stigma and discrimination against HIV/AIDS patients and some of the special problems faced by women and children infected with HIV.

Lunch at the Castle

5. After a meet-and-greet and photo ops with Mission staff and Peace Corps volunteers at the Ambassador's Residence, the First Lady went to the Castle for a tour of the slave dungeons (the Castle was once a slave trading fort) and a lunch hosted by President Kufuor. Guests included the Ambassador, the presidents of the U.S. universities in the AEI Textbooks and Learning Materials Program, and four GOG ministers. In his toast President Kufuor praised President Bush (who he dubbed "the busiest" man in the world) for sending his better half to Ghana. He expressed special appreciation for U.S. assistance, particularly Ghana's expected signing of a \$500 million MCA compact. The First Lady responded by noting the warm hospitality she had been shown in Ghana and expressed appreciation for Ghana's friendship and support to the U.S. The two also exchanged gifts.

Extensive Media Coverage

6. Local media coverage of Mrs. Bush's visit was extensive and generally positive. Each of Ghana's four television stations, state-owned Radio Ghana, and Accra's two most popular private radio stations (Peace FM, Joy FM) carried coverage of the first and last days of the First Lady's three-day stay. Ghana's two largest papers, the state-owned Daily Graphic and Ghanaian Times, and independents Daily Mail and Daily Guide ran front-page stories for these days as

well. National wire service Ghana News Agency provided considerable coverage on its website ghanaweb.com and in selected print outlets.

17. Most articles focused on the launch of the Africa Education Initiative and devoted significant space to straightforward and factual accounts of the initiative and Mrs. Bush's commitment to education. Visits with HIV/AIDS patients at Korle-Bu Hospital and President Kufuor at the Castle received positive but limited coverage because of controlled media access. State-owned Ghana Television ran an eight-minute summary of the First Lady's visit as the first item on its January 17 evening news.

18. The Daily Mail carried a January 16 editorial entitled "Akwaaba (welcome) Laura Bush" that urged the First Lady to convince President Bush of the importance of African development and growth. The visit also generated significant international press, including articles filed from the press pool of Reuters, the Associated Press and the Washington Times.

Comment

19. Mrs. Bush's visit was a high point in U.S.-Ghana relations, only the second-ever visit of a U.S. First Lady, since Hillary Clinton's visit. Mrs. Bush clearly enjoyed her stay and was particularly impressed with the impact that organizations of persons living with HIV/AIDS can have in fighting stigma and discrimination. Post was delighted with the visit and we appreciate the support we received from the Department, USAID Washington, and the White House.

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